

# "A CERTAIN RICH MAN ——" <sup>1</sup>

By LAWRENCE PERRY

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VELYN COLCORD glanced up the table with the appraising eye of a young hostess who had already established a reputation for her dinners. The room had been decorated with a happy effect of national colors, merged with those of the allied nations, and neither in the table nor its appointments was a flaw revealed — while the low, contented murmur of conversation and light laughter attending completion of the first course afforded assurance that the company was well chosen and the atmosphere assertive in qualities that made for equanimity and good cheer.

She smiled slightly, nodding at the butler, who had been watching her anxiously, and then glanced out the corner of her eye at Professor Simec, seated at her right. She had entertained doubts concerning him, had, in fact, resented the business necessity which had brought him thither as guest of honor, not through any emotion approximating inhospitality but wholly because of her mistrust as to the effect of this alien note upon her dinner, which was quite impromptu, having been arranged at the eleventh hour in deference to the wishes of Jerry Dane, a partner of Colcord's, who was handling the firm's foreign war patents.

She had done the best she could as to guests, had done exceedingly well, as it chanced, fortune having favored her especially in the cases of several of those who sat about the table. And now Simec was fully involved in conversation with Bessie Dane, who seemed deeply in-

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terested. As for the man, weazened and attenuate, she could catch only his profile — the bulging, hairless brow, and beard curling outward from the tip, forming sort of a crescent, which she found hardly less sinister than the cynical twist where grizzled whiskers and mustaches conjoined and the cold, level white eyes that she had noted as dominant characteristics when he was presented.

Simec was a laboratory recluse who had found his *métier* in the war. Rumor credited to him at least one of the deadliest chemical combinations employed by the allied armies. But it was merely rumor; nothing definite was known. These are things of which little is hinted and less said. None the less, intangible as were his practical achievements — whatever they might be — his reputation was substantial, enhanced, small doubt, by the very vagueness of his endeavors. The element of mystery, which his physical appearance tended not to allay, invested him, as it were, with a thaumaturgic veil through which was dimly revealed the man. It was as though his personality was merely a nexus to the things he stood for and had done, so that he appeared to Evelyn less a human entity than a symbol. But at least Bessie Dane was interested and the fine atmosphere of the table was without a taint.

Shrugging almost imperceptibly, she withdrew her eyes and looked across the table with an expression which Nicholas Colcord could have interpreted had he not been engrossed with Sybil Latham. Evelyn studied him with admiring tenderness as he lounged in his chair, toying idly with a fork, smiling at something his partner was saying, while her mind ran lovingly over the dominant traits of a personality which was so strong, so keenly alive, so sensitive to decent, manly things, so perfectly balanced.

Failing to catch his eye, Evelyn turned to her plate filled with a subtle melancholy. When would there be another dinner like this? Not, at all events, until the war was over. Nick had spoken about this — very defi-

nitely; there would be no more entertaining. She had agreed with him, of course, not, however, escaping the conviction that her husband's viewpoint was more or less in keeping with a certain unusual sombreness which she had caught creeping into his mood in the past year or so.

Still, everybody who amounted to anything was pulling up on the bit and doing something or talking of doing something or other for the country. It was already assured that the season would be insufferably dull — from a social standpoint at least. Evelyn could not suppress a certain resentment. She was not one of those who had found an element of thrill in the suddenly altered perspectives. Her plans for the spring season had been laid; engagements had been accepted or declined, as functions promised to be worth while or uninteresting; all the delicate interlocking machinery of the life in which Evelyn Colcord moved, somewhat prominently, was in motion — then the sudden checking of the wheels: war.

Now there were memories of her husband's sober words; now there was young Jeffery Latham at her elbow — he had been almost shot to pieces in France — now there was Simec, the genius of diabolical achievement. . . . What were things coming to? Even the weather had gone wrong. Outside, an unseasonable cold rain, lashed by a northeast gale, was driving against the panes of the French windows, and the sizzling effulgence of an arc-lamp revealed pools of water lying on the asphalt of the avenue. . . .

The dry, softly modulated voice of Captain Latham at her left lifted Evelyn from her trend of sombre revery.

"Nick is looking uncommonly fit — he'll go in for the cavalry, I suppose."

The young British officer spoke more with a half-humorous effort at conversation than any other motive, but she turned to him with a gesture of appeal.

"Jeffery," she said, "you make me shiver!"

The man stared at her curiously.

"Why, I — I'm sorry. I'm sure I didn't —"

"Oh, of course," she interrupted, "I know you didn't. Don't be silly. As for me, I'm perfectly foolish, don't you know. Only" — she paused — "I detest war talk. It's so fearfully upsetting. It seems only yesterday that it was a subject to drag in when conversation lagged. But now —"

Latham's quizzical reply was almost upon his lips, when, evidently changing his mind, he spoke dryly.

"No doubt you'll become used to it in time. . . . By the by, I was in fun about old Nick. His objection to grouse coverts and deer-stalking — I can't fancy him in war."

As she didn't reply he picked up his fork, adding: "Yet he's a tremendous athlete — polo and all that sort of thing. Do you know, I suspect that when the real pull comes he won't object to potting at Germans. . . . Did you do these menu cards, Evelyn? They're awfully well done."

She nodded, eying him eagerly.

"Yes, I painted them this afternoon. You see, it was a rush order. . . . As to Nick, I don't think it will come to his enlisting. I've never considered it, really. He's awfully mixed up in government finances, don't you know. We all tell him he's more valuable where he is."

Latham smiled faintly.

"What does Nick say to that?"

"Oh, I don't know." She shrugged. "Nothing very definite. War has been a taboo subject with him — I mean from the first when you all went in. I know he has strong feelings about it, terribly strong. But he never talks about them."

"He went in strong on the financial end, didn't he?" asked the Englishman. "Some one in London told me he'd made a lot of oof."

She nodded, coloring.

"Yes, oceans of money. . . . Not that we needed it," Evelyn added, a trifle defensively.



"I know; it just came," was Latham's comment. "Well, it all helped us out of a nasty mess."

Evelyn was thinking and did not reply immediately. When she did speak it was apparent that in changing the subject she had followed a natural impulse without intention or design.

"Jeffery," she said, "do you know I haven't been able to make you out since you arrived here — nor Sybil either," she added, nodding toward Latham's wife, whose classic, flaxen-haired profile was turned toward them.

The man was smiling curiously.

"I didn't realize we had changed so."

"Well, you have, both of you. You talk the same and act the same — except a — a sort of reserve; something; I don't know just what. . . . Somehow, you, and Sybil, too, seem as though you felt strange, aloof, out of place. You used to be so absolutely — well, natural and at home with us all —"

"My word!" Latham laughed but made no further comment.

"Of course," Evelyn went on, "you've been through a lot, I can appreciate that. When I got Sybil's letter I simply wept: twenty-four hours in a muddy shell-hole; invalided for good, with an arm you can't raise above your shoulder; a horrid scar down your face. . . ."

"It does make rather a poor face to look at, doesn't it?" Latham flushed and hurried on. "Well, I've no complaint."

She glanced at the cross on his olive-drab coat.

"Of course not! How absurd, Jeffery! But how did Sybil ever stand it? How did she *live* through it? I mean the parting, the months of suspense, word that you were missing, then mortally wounded? . . . Her brother killed by gas?"

Latham glanced at his wife, a soft light in his eyes.

"Poor Sybil," he replied. "She was a brick, Evelyn — a perfect brick. I don't know how she got through it. But one does, you know."

"Yes, one does, I suppose." Evelyn sighed. "But how? *I* couldn't; I simply couldn't. Why, Jeffery, I can't bear even to think of it."

Latham shook his head negatively at the footman, who stood at his side, and then turned smiling to Evelyn. "Oh, come! Of course you could. You don't understand now, but you will. There's a sort of grace given, I fancy."

"Jeffery, I don't want to understand, and I don't want any grace, and I think you're horrid and unsympathetic." She tapped him admonishingly on the arm, laughing lightly. But the gloom was still in her dark-gray eyes. "But, after all, you are right. We *are* in for it, just as you have been. . . . God grant there are women more Spartan than I."

Latham grimaced and was raising a deprecating hand when she caught it impulsively.

"Please let's talk about something else."

"Very well." He smiled mockingly and lowered his voice. "Your friend at your right there — curious beggar, don't you think?"

Evelyn glanced at Simec, turning again to Latham.

"He gives me the creeps," she confessed. "It seems absurd, but he does."

"Really!" The Englishman stared at the man a moment. "Do you know," he resumed, "he does seem a bit uncanny. Where'd Nick pick him up?"

"It was Jerry Dane," she replied. "He's done some tremendous things on the other side. Jerry met him in Washington the other day and seems to regard him as a find. He has no business sense and has given away practically everything. Now we are going to capitalize him; I believe that's the word. I never saw him before to-night" — her voice sank to a whisper — "and, do you know, I hope I never shall again." She shrugged. "Listen to him."

Several of the guests were already doing that. His toneless voice rose and fell monotonously, and he ap-

peared so detached from what he was saying that as Evelyn gazed at him she seemed to find difficulty in relating words that were said to the speaker; only the slight movement of the lips and an occasional formless gesture made the association definite.

"Doctor Allison," he was saying, "has missed the distinction between *hostia honoraria* and *hostia piacularis*. In the former case the deity accepts the gift of a life; in the latter he demands it."

"What in the world are you all talking about now?" asked Evelyn plaintively. "Not war —?"

"Sacrifice, Mrs. Colcord." Simec inclined his head slightly in her direction.

"I was saying," explained Doctor Allison, "that we do well if we send our young men to battle in the spirit of privileged sacrifice, as — as something that is our — our — yes — our proud privilege, as I say, to do."

Simec shook his head in thoughtful negation.

"That is sentiment, excellent sentiment; unfortunately, it doesn't stand assay. Reaction comes. We do better if we make our gift of blood as a matter of unalterable necessity. We make too much of it all, in any event. The vast evil of extended peace is the attachment of too great value to luxuries and to human life — trite, but true. We know, of course, that the world has progressed chiefly over the dead bodies of men and, yes, women and children."

Some new element had entered into the voice. Whether it was herself or whether it was Simec, Evelyn was in no mood to determine. . . . She was aware only of a certain metallic cadence which beat cruelly upon her nerves. Silence had followed, but not of the same sort as before. As though seeking complete withdrawal, Evelyn turned her eyes out of the window. A wayfarer, head down, was struggling through the nimbus of watery electric light; a horse-drawn vehicle was plodding by. Colcord's voice brought her back; it was strained.

"I don't feel as Allison does," he said. "And I cer-

tainly have no sympathy with Simec.” He leaned forward, his elbows on the table. “You see,” he went on, “I — I — well, maybe, I’m a product of extended peace, as Simec puts it. No doubt I’m soft. But this war — I’ve never talked nor let myself think much about the war — but this whole thing of sacrifice got under me from the very first. . . . Young men, thousands, hundreds of thousands of them, yes, millions, torn from their homes, from their mothers, their fathers — their wives, for what? To be blown into shapeless, unrecognizable clay, to be maimed, made useless for life. My God! It has kept me awake nights!”

“Colcord” — Simec’s white eyes rested professionally upon the host — “let us get to the root of your state of mind; your brief is for the individual as against the common good, is it not?”

Colcord frowned.

“Oh, I haven’t any brief, Simec; I’ve never reasoned about the thing, that is, in a cold, scientific way. It’s a matter of heart, I suppose — of instinct. I just can’t seem to stand the calculating, sordid wastage of young life and all that it involves. Now, of course, it has come closer home. And it’s terrible.”

“You never would shoot anything for sport, would you, old fellow?” said Latham, sympathetically, “not even pheasants.”

Colcord tossed his beautifully modelled head.

“Latham, I tell you, I’m soft; I’m the ultimate product of peace and civilization.”

“Yes, you’re soft, terribly so,” smiled Dane. “I ought to know; I played opposite you at tackle for two years.”

“Stuff! You understand what I mean, Jerry; I guess you all do. I’ve never talked this way before; as I say, I’ve always kept the war in the background, tried to gloss it over, forget it. But I couldn’t; I’ve done a heap of thinking.” He sat bolt upright, his clinched fist upon the table. “All these young chaps herded together and



suddenly turned loose from all they've known and done and thought — I tell you I can't duck it any more."

"I know, old chap." Arnold Bates, who wrote light society novels, spoke soothingly. "It is — rotten. But what are you going to do about it?"

Colcord's fine brow was wrinkled painfully.

"Nothing, Arnold, nothing. That's the trouble; you have to sit still and watch this wrecking of civilization or else get out and take a hack at the thing yourself. I can't do that; not unless I have to." He paused. "I've had a good time in this life; things have always come easily —"

Sybil Latham was regarding him contemplatively.

"Yes," she murmured, "I don't know a man who has impressed me as so thoroughly enjoying life as you, Nick —"

Colcord stared at her a moment.

"Well, I do," he replied at length. "But I want to say this right here: if some person or presence, some supernatural being, say, should come here to-night, at this table, and tell me that by giving up my life right now I would, through that act, bring an end to —"

"Nick!" Evelyn Colcord's voice was poignantly sharp.

"If through that little sacrifice the blood glut in Europe would end, I'd do it cheerfully, joyfully, in a minute."

Simec was gazing at the speaker with half-closed eyes; the others, in thrall of his words, were staring at the table or at one another.

"What a thought!" Mrs. Allison glanced at him curiously. "Coming from you, of all men, Nick!"

"I wonder if I could say that?" Jerry Dane sank down in his chair, put his hands in his pockets, and gazed sombrely up at the ceiling. "By George! I wish I could — but I can't."

Bates shifted uneasily. He shrugged.

"It's too hypothetical. And yet — of course it's ab-

surd — yet if the thing *could* happen, I think I'd stick with Colcord."

"In other words"—Simec's voice now had a sibilant hiss—"if you could end war through your death you'd be willing to die—now, or at any specified time?"

"If you're talking to me," said Colcord, "I'm on record. Those who know me well know I don't have to say a thing twice."

"I was talking to Mr. Bates," replied the inventor. "He seemed doubtful."

"Well, I'm not now," retorted the writer sharply. "I'm with Nick absolutely."

Doctor Allison was shaking his head.

"Theoretically, I would make the same assertion," he confessed, "but I wish to be honest; I don't know whether I could do it or not."

"Neither do I," said Dane. "A certainty like that and taking a chance on the battlefield are two different things. What do you say, Latham; you've been through the mill?"

"Well, you know," shrugged the soldier, "I fancy I'm a bit hardened. I'd like to see the thing through now. We've gone so far, don't you know?"

There was a momentary silence broken only by the soft movements of the butler and footman. One of the windows rattled in a gust of wind and rain. Under the flickering candle-lights the company seemed to draw together in a fellowship that was not the bond of gustatory cheer—which Evelyn could so infallibly establish at her table—but a communion of sympathetic feeling as of one drawing to another in the common thrall of subdued emotion. The prevailing mood impressed Evelyn Colcord strongly, and, glancing down the table, she started at her accuracy in divining the cause. Simec's place was vacant. She recalled now that but a moment before he had been summoned to the telephone. She had noted his temporary departure only as one notices the lifting of a saffron mist.

Unquestionably, the absorbing topic had gripped the imagination of all. It was sufficiently theoretical, so absolutely hypothetical, in fact, so utterly impossible, that Evelyn's alert intellect found pleasure in grappling with it.

"I wonder —!" Her elbows were on the table, her chin upon her hands. "Of course, it's awfully easy to say; but I wonder how it would be if we really faced such a question. Just consider, Arnold,"—she was smiling at Bates—"the superhuman firing squad is outside the door; the superhuman agent stands at your side ready to push the button and end the war as the shots ring out. You picture it, of course, with your imagination. Well, sir, what do you say?"

Bates grimaced, twisting the stem of his wine-glass in his fingers.

"Well, one can say only what he *thinks* he would do. It's so absurd that I can't visualize your picture—not even with my imagination. But it seems to me—it *seems* that I would gladly make the sacrifice."

Doctor Allison, who had been scowling at the ceiling, passing his fingers thoughtfully through his sparse gray hair, sighed deeply.

"That's just it; how could one possibly tell? The mind adapts itself to situations, I suppose; in fact, of course it does. It's altogether difficult, sitting at this table with its food and color and light and excellent company, to place yourself in the position Nicholas has devised. It's simply flying from the very comfortable and congenial and normal present into a dark limbo that is deucedly uncomfortable, uncongenial, and abnormal. I can't go beyond what I've already said; I don't know whether I'd do it or not."

"You'd like to, of course," suggested Mrs. Dane.

"Oh, of course I'd *like* to," was the reply. "The point I make is whether I could or not; I don't *know*."

"Well"—the young woman paused—"I'm not going

to put the question to my husband because I wouldn't let Jerry do it, even if he were willing."

"Oh, come now, Bess!" grinned Dane.

"Well, I wouldn't, and I imagine I'd have some rights in the matter."

"Now we're getting back to Simec's *hostia honoraria* and *hostia piacularis*," laughed Bates.

"It is a new viewpoint," sighed Evelyn. "Curiously, I hadn't thought of *that*."

She smiled across the table at her husband, but he was slouched in his chair, his eyes staring vacantly over her head.

"Of course you'd all do it, every one," he said presently. "The trouble now is that you are attempting to visualize the tragic part of it and not considering the humanitarian side — the great good that would come of the sacrifice. When you look at it that way you would be willing to do it — and think it a mighty darn cheap exchange."

"Well, perhaps so," grumbled Allison. "But I can't help thinking I'm glad I don't have to face the alternative."

Evelyn turned swiftly toward Sybil Latham, under the impression that she had made some little exclamation or that she had checked one. But her face was hard and inscrutable.

"Let's change the subject." Evelyn laughed self-consciously. "It's so far-fetched; it's getting a bit on my nerves."

Even as she spoke she knew that Simec had resumed his seat, although he had made no sound and her eyes were upon her husband. She was thus not surprised to hear his voice.

"I gather, then," he said, as though picking up a conversational thread, "that there are two of you who would be willing to make the gift of sacrifice — Colcord and Bates."

His manner was such as to draw them all from their



mood of idle, comfortable speculation to rigidity. Turning to him, searching him, they saw, as it seemed to them, a new being divested of vagueness — dominant, commanding, remorseless. Sitting rigid, his thin, hairy neck stretched outward, he suggested some sinister bird of prey. Thus poised for an instant he regarded the two men whom he had named.

"Suppose," he proceeded, "that I could make this absurd condition — as Bates terms it — exist. Would you gentlemen still hold your position? Believe me, I ask this in the utmost good faith —"

Evelyn Colcord spoke before either man could make reply.

"Nick, this is getting a bit unpleasant, really." She laughed nervously. "Don't you think we could turn to something more cheerful? I adore a joke —"

"But this is not a joke, Mrs. Colcord," rejoined Simec gravely.

"Well, in any event —" began Evelyn, but her husband interrupted.

"I told you I was on record, Simec," he said. "You show me a way to end this carnival of murder — and I'm your man."

"I, too." Bates chuckled. "Perhaps, after all, we've been dining closer to the supernatural than we realized. Well, I'm game. Life, after all, is only a few more summers and a few more winters, even if we live it out. Go to it, Simec." There was sort of a reckless ring in the writer's voice which was taken as a sign that he was seriously impressed. But Bates would be; he had imagination and was temperamental.

"I wish you all would stop." Bessie Dane's voice was childishly plaintive.

"Nick, please!" cried Evelyn. "This is not at all funny."

"I don't see the joke, I must confess," grumbled Allison.

Evelyn wished that Latham or his wife would add

weight to the protest, but they remained silent, staring curiously at the inventor, as, indeed, they had throughout. Now she thought of it, she realized that the two had remained practically aloof from the discussion that had preceded Simec's *dénouement*.

“I'm afraid, Simec,” said Colcord crisply, “that we're getting a bit unpopular. We'd better drop the subject. It was rather a cheap play, I'll admit, stacking myself up as a martyr in a wholly impossible situation. You called me — and Bates there — rather cleverly. . . . The drinks are on us. . . . At the same time I meant what I said, even if it was far-fetched; I mean I was sincere.”

Simec threw out his arm in a long, bony gesture.

“I am perfectly convinced of that. That is why I am going to ask you to make your offer good.”

Had it come from any one else there would have been derisive laughter. But Simec, a man to whom had been credited so much of mystery and achievement, was speaking. In the soft crimson glow of the table he stood, reducing to practical application the very situation which they had found so attractive, only because of its utter grotesque impossibility. It was startling, grimly thrilling. There was the sense among some about the table of struggling mentally to break the spell which this coldly unemotional creature of science had cast. At length Dane spoke as though by sheer physical effort.

“Simec — we — we all know you're a genius. But just now you don't quite get over.”

The inventor turned his head slowly toward the speaker.

“I don't think I quite understand.”

“Rats,” said Dane roughly. “Here Nick says he'd give up his life if the war could be stopped and you bob up and tell him to make good, throwing sort of a Faust effect over the whole dinner. All right for Nick and Arnold Bates — but how about you, Simec? How will you stop the war if they shuffle off? I'll bite once on anything; how will you do it?” There was a general

movement of the diners. Dane's wife laughed a trifle hysterically.

Simec arose and stood leaning forward, his hands upon the table.

"The situation which Colcord devised, as it happens, is not so impossible as you think. In fact, it may prove to be quite feasible—" He paused, but no voice rose to break the silence. The candle-lights were flickering softly in an entering breath of wind. Evelyn looked appealingly at her husband, who grimaced and shrugged slightly.

"I imagine I have some sort of a reputation in the way of physical formula as applied to war," Simec went on presently. "Dane is about to handle a rather extraordinary gun of mine in the foreign market. But one gun differs from another only inasmuch as it is somewhat more deadly—its destructiveness is not total." He raised a thin forefinger and levelled it along the table.

"Let us assume," he said, "that there has been devised and perfected an apparatus which will release a destructive energy through the medium of ether waves. If you understand anything about the wireless telegraph you will grasp what I mean; in itself the wireless, of course, involves transmitted power. Let us transform and amplify that power and we encompass—destruction. The air is filled with energy. A sun-ray is energy; you will recall that Archimedes concentrated it through immense burning-glasses which set fire to Roman ships."

His voice had grown clear and strong, as though he was lecturing to a class of students.

"Now, then, assume an instrument such as I have roughly described be placed in the hands of our allied nations, an instrument which releases and propels against the enemy energy so incomprehensibly enormous that it destroys matter instantaneously, whether organic or inorganic; assume that in a few hours it could lay the greatest host the world ever saw in death, whether they

were concealed in the earth or were in the air, or wherever they were; assume it could level a great city. Assuming all this, can you conceive that the nations holding this mighty force in their hands could bring about peace which would not only be instant but would be permanent?"

There was silence for a moment. The footman, obeying a significant glance from the butler, withdrew; the butler himself went softly out of the room. Latham looked up with the expression of a man emerging from a trance.

"I don't fancy any one could doubt that," he said.

"No, indeed. Certainly not." Allison gestured in playful salute. "Let me congratulate you upon a fine flight of imagination, Professor Simec."

"Thank you — but it isn't imagination, Doctor Allison." The man's voice had again become flat and unemotional, with the effect of withdrawal of personality. "I have reason to think I have perfected some such device. . . . At least I believe I now possess the means of destroying human life on a wholesale scale. There is yet more to do before we may successfully assail inorganic matter. The waves penetrate but do not as yet destroy, so that while we should easily bring dissolution to human beings we cannot yet disintegrate the walls behind which they lurk. That, however, is a detail —"

"Just like that, eh?" No one smiled at Jerry Dane's comment. Bates leaned forward.

"Where do Colcord and I come in?"

Simec, who had resumed his seat, turned to him.

"Of course — I beg your pardon. I should have explained at the outset that the discovery has never had adequate practical test. One of my assistants lost his life a month or so ago, to be sure; an extremely promising man. The incident was of value in demonstrating practically a theoretical deadliness; unfortunately, it proved also that the power energized ether waves in all



directions, whereas obviously it should be within the power of the operator to send it only in a given direction."

"Otherwise," remarked Latham, "it would be as fatal to the side using it as to the army against whom it was directed."

"Precisely." Simec lifted his wine-glass and sipped slowly. "For a time," he went on, "this drawback seemed insuperable, just as it has been in wireless telegraphy. Within the past week, however, I am convinced that a solution of that difficulty has been reached. In theory and in tests on a minor scale it certainly has. My assistants, however, refuse to serve in the demonstrations at full power — which, of course, are vitally necessary — even though I engage to share a part, but not, of course, the major part, of the risk. I have been equally unfortunate in enlisting others, to whom, naturally, I was in duty bound to designate possible — in fact, extremely probable — dangers."

"In more precise words," snapped Bates, "if your invention is what you think it is your assistants are bound to die."

Simec hesitated a moment, his gleaming brow wrinkled thoughtfully.

"Well, not precisely," he said at length. "That is, not necessarily. There is, of course, as I have said, that possi — that probability. I cannot be certain. Assuming the more serious outcome materializes, there will be no further danger for those who operate; I shall have learned all that it is necessary to know." He paused. "Then war will cease; either before or immediately after the initial field application."

"But this is absurd." Allison smote the table in agitation. "Why don't you secure condemned convicts?"

"Even were that possible, I should not care to proceed in that way. Again, I must have one or more men of keen intelligence."

"But neither Colcord nor Bates is a scientist!"

"That is not at all necessary," was the composed reply. "I am the scientist."

"And Nick the victim," flashed Evelyn Colcord. "Well, I most decidedly and unalterably object, Professor Simec."

"Your husband and Mr. Bates, inspired by humanitarian motives, named a condition under which they would *give* — not risk — their lives. I meet their condition, at least so far as it lies within human agency to do. . . . Of course they can withdraw their offer —"

Bates, who had left his seat and was walking up and down the room, turned suddenly, standing over the scientist with upraised hand.

"Simec, I withdraw right here. I'm no fool. The whole spirit of this — this situation is not in keeping with the original idea. Not at all. Whether you are joking, serious, or simply insane, I'm out. Try it on yourself."

"I have already assumed great risks. In furtherance of my device — which, as you may imagine, will have far-reaching effects — I must survive, if I can."

Evelyn, who had suppressed an exclamation of approval of Arnold Bates's stanch words, turned to her husband. His jaws were bulging at the corners, his eyes alight. In a species of panic she tried to speak but could not.

"And you, Colcord?" Simec's colorless delivered question came as from afar.

Colcord had arisen and was staring at the inventor with the face of one exalted.

"If you have what you say you have, Simec, you meet my condition to the letter. At the very least, it will be a most important asset to the cause of my country. In either case the least I can give to help it along is my life — if that proves necessary. . . . When do you want me?"

In the silence that followed Evelyn Colcord, sitting

like a statue, unable to move nor to speak, passed through a limbo of nameless emotion. Through her mind swept a flashing filament of despair, hope, craven fear, and sturdy resolution. Tortured in the human alembic, she was at length resolved, seeing with a vision that pierced all her horizons. And then, trembling, tense, there came — a thought? A vision? She knew not what it was, nor was she conscious of attempting to ascertain. She knew only that for a fleeting instant the veil had been lifted and that she had gazed upon serenity and that all was well. Further, she had no inclination to know. Not that she feared complete revelation; for that matter, some subconscious conviction that all would be well illumined her senses. This she spurned, or rather ignored, in a greater if nameless exaltation. Stern with the real fibre of her womanhood, she lifted her head in pride.

Then, moved by initiative not her own, her face turned, not to her husband, but to her guests, each in turn. Arnold Bates was crushing a napkin in his sensitive fingers, flushed, angry, rebellious, perhaps a trifle discomfited. Dane was smiling foolishly; Bessie was leaning forward on the table, dead white, inert. Doctor Allison's head was shaking; he was clicking his tongue and his wife was twisting her stout fingers one around another. So her gaze wandered, and then, as though emerging from a dream, revived, calm, she studied each intently. She knew not why, but something akin to contempt crept into her mind.

It was as though seeking relief that her eyes rested upon Sybil Latham. The Englishwoman's face was turned to Colcord; her color was heightened only slightly, but in her blue eyes was the light of serene stars, and about her lips those new lines of self-sacrifice, anxiety, sorrow, which Evelyn had resented as marring the woman's delicate beauty, now imparted to her face vast strength, ineffable dignity, nobility.

Evelyn Colcord's throat clicked; for a moment she did not breathe, while a vivid flash of jealous emotion de-

parted, leaving in its place a great peace, an exaltation born of sudden knowing. Instinctively seeking further confirmation, her eyes, now wide and big and flaming, swept to Latham. His face, too, was turned toward her husband. It was the grimly triumphant visage of the fighter who knows his own kind, of the friend and believer whose faith, suddenly justified, has made him proud.

Evelyn rose and stood erect, staring into vacancy. Here were two who *knew*, who understood — who had been through hell and found it worth while.

Voices, expostulatory voices, roused her. Allison was at her side and Dane, whose wife, weeping, was pulling at her bare arm. Colcord and Simec stood to one side, aloof, as though already detached from the world.

“Evelyn!” Allison’s voice was peremptory. “I command you! You’re the only one who has the right to check this damn foolishness. I command you to speak.”

“Evelyn —” Dane’s voice trailed into nothingness.

Again her eyes turned to Sybil Latham, and then, rigidly as an automaton, she walked swiftly to her husband’s side. For a moment the two stood facing each other, eye riveted to eye. Her beautiful bare arms flew out swiftly, resting upon his shoulders, not encircling his neck.

“Nick —” Her voice was low, guttural. “I — I didn’t help you much, did I, dear heart? I didn’t understand. They’ve been saying it would all come home to us. But I didn’t think so quickly — nor to us. I — I wasn’t ready. I am now. I want to help; I — I —” Her fingers clutched his shoulders convulsively. “When — when do you go?”

Colcord stood a moment, his eyes smouldering upon her.

“To-morrow morning at seven,” he replied. “That was the hour, Professor Simec?” he added with a side-wise inclination of his head.



"Yes." The scientist looked away, hesitated, and then joined in the little procession to the dimly lighted hall. Evelyn started as she felt her fingers locked together in a firm hand.

"You *know*, dear girl, don't you?" There was a mist in Latham's eyes.

But Evelyn's face was light.

"Yes, Jeffery," she said proudly, "I know now."